

# Conversation Analysis in Applied Linguistics III: Application to Nonnative Discourse

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## Introduction

This paper reviews previous studies on nonnative discourse. Nonnative discourse has been dealt with in the second language acquisition (SLA) paradigm for approximately 25 years. On the other hand, it is only recently that conversation analysis (CA) researchers started paying attention to nonnative speaker (NNS) interaction. In this paper, I will review some important studies on nonnative discourse that were carried out in several research areas: input, interaction, and recast studies; communication strategies (CSs) studies; language socialization studies; and conversation analysis (CA) studies.

## Input, Interaction, and Recast Studies in SLA

Input and interaction studies in SLA are aimed at offering a theoretical basis for supporting a close relationship between input/interaction and acquisition. The ultimate goal of this area of work is to elucidate what roles interaction with native speakers (NSs) play in language acquisition, and what the necessary conditions are for successful language acquisition to occur (Long, 1980; 1981; Pica, 1988). The majority of studies in this area assume that language acquisition means acquisition of forms and their use.

Early studies on input and interaction in SLA focused on the role of input during negotiation of meaning. Negotiation of meaning in SLA refers to conversational exchanges adapted to problems of second language learners' or their interlocutors' understanding such as confirmation checks, comprehension checks, rephrasing, other-repair, and the like (Ellis, 1994; 1999; Long, 1983; 1996; Pica, 1994), which are caused by learners' linguistic errors or problems. It has been claimed that in order to progress to the next proficiency level of a second language (L2), learners need to receive comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982; 1985), and the most beneficial comprehensible input is that which results from negotiation—repetitions, confirmations, comprehension checks, clarification requests, and the like (Long, 1981; 1983). Studies that

followed Long's research supported the claim that negotiation work with NSs or other NNSs helps NNSs' comprehension (e.g., Kelch, 1985; Pica 1988; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987).

Later studies recognized the importance of negotiation of meaning as one way of pushing learners' output. It has been argued that learners need not only to receive comprehensible input but they also need to be pushed to produce forms and structures slightly above their current interlanguage (IL) level (Swain, 1985; 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Pushed output is considered to elicit negative feedback (e.g., requests for clarification from NS or NNS interlocutors), which makes learners notice the gap between their current IL and the target language (TL) (Schmidt, 1990; 1993; Schmidt & Frota, 1986). These claims about the positive effects of "pushed output" and "noticing" in NNS interaction triggered a number of input and interaction studies that testify the claim. So far, input and interaction studies agree that negotiation facilitates language acquisition not only because negotiation provides learners with tailor-made comprehensible input, but also because it promotes learners' production and noticing of the gap between what they know and what is produced by NSs (Gass & Varonis, 1994; Long, 1996; Pica, 1992; 1994).

Recently, a number of studies have focused on one form of negative feedback, recasts, in communicative L2 classrooms and experimental NS-NNS interaction (e.g., Doughty, 1994; 1999; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Long & Robinson, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Mackay, Gass, & McDonough, 1998; 2000; Mackey & Phillip, 1998; Oliver, 1995; Spada & Fröhlich, 1995; among others). According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), recast refers to "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus error" (p. 46). Underlying recast studies is the concept of "noticing" (Schmidt, 1990). In order to acquire a new linguistic form, it is necessary that the learner notice the form in the input, and a recast that provides the feedback immediately after the learner's incorrect IL utterance may help the learner notice the new form without interrupting the focus on meaning. Therefore, the key questions addressed in recast studies are whether recasts as a form of feedback can indeed be noticed by the learner and if so, whether they help the learners change their IL system. So far, answers to these questions reported in previous studies are mixed. Some studies have reported positive effects for recasts. Recasts may be noticed if additional attention-getting cues are supplied together with the recasts (Doughty, 1999), and when recasts are noticed, they may be effective in showing learners the gap between their current IL and the target language (Long & Robinson, 1998). Furthermore, Ohta (2001b) found an additional benefit of recasts. In her Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) classroom study, she demonstrated that learners mentally attended to and learned from recasts that a teacher addressed to the other students. Yet, other studies have reported that recasts are not effective in that they are not interpreted by the learner as corrective feedback, but rather as confirmation of meaning (Carroll, 1997; Lyster, 1998). Further research is under way to find out how and under what conditions recasts bring about a change in learners' IL systems.

## Studies on Communication Strategies (CSs)

SLA researchers who have investigated communication strategies (CSs) of NNSs dealt with the issues of how NNSs cope with an incomplete IL system and what strategies or tactics NNSs employ in coping with communicative difficulties that may arise from their deficiency in the target language (TL). CSs are considered to facilitate language acquisition because they help learners keep the conversation going and thus provide more opportunities for input (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991).

Studies on CSs can be broadly divided into two types: psycholinguistic studies and interactional studies.

Most earlier studies on CSs took a psycholinguistic approach (e.g., Bialystok, 1983; Haastrup & Phillipson, 1983; Tarone, 1977). Psycholinguistic studies view CSs as mental plans implemented by the learner to overcome difficulties in communication and locate CSs in models of speech production or cognitive organization or processing (Kasper & Kellerman, 1997). These studies tend to look closely at CSs by isolating the strategies from communicative contexts.

On the other hand, interactional studies acknowledge the roles of both the learner and his/her interlocutor: they view CSs as joint endeavors accomplished both by the learner and his/her interlocutor. They examine how the participants in conversation overcome the gap between the second-language learners' IL and the TL in real communication. Researchers from various theoretical orientations such as critical sociolinguistics (Rampton, 1997), collaborative theory (Wilkes-Gibbs, 1997), and pattern theory (Wagner, 1983) have examined CSs from the interactional point of view. As will be discussed later in this paper, some researchers have also investigated CSs from a conversation analysis point of view (Wagner & Firth, 1997).

Previous studies have identified a number of CSs that NNSs employ. CSs are generally divided into two types: achievement strategies and reduction strategies. Achievement strategies include approximation, word coinage, circumlocutions, appeal for assistance, restructuring, and the like, while reduction strategies include topic avoidance, message abandonment, language switch, and the like.

However, most of the CSs that NNSs have been found to employ may overlap with generic practice of mundane NS-NS conversation, and how NNSs' use of these strategies differs from NSs' use of the same strategies still remains unclear.

## Language Socialization Studies

Recently, some SLA researchers have started to apply the language socialization perspective put forward by Ochs and Schieffelin (e.g., Ochs, 1996; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). While the input, interaction, and recast studies reviewed above focus mainly on

acquisition of grammar, language socialization studies examine the process of learning to use language meaningfully and appropriately, including acquisition of pragmatic abilities and interactional styles. Language socialization studies view the acquisition of linguistic and sociocultural knowledge as integral to one another and assert the importance of the influence of cultural norms and ideologies on various forms of expert-novice communication. Ochs and Schieffelin's view of language socialization, which is based on their extensive ethnographic work in the U.S. and the South Pacific, works in two ways: socialization through language and socialization to use the language. What the authors refer to as socialization through language is a process in which novices learn to be competent members of a society through participation in daily routines. By taking part in daily routines, novices implicitly receive cultural knowledge through language forms and practices. On the other hand, socialization to use the language is more explicit, and it takes place when experts clearly direct novices to use the language according to the social norms.

Although the studies by Ochs and Schieffelin examined interaction outside of the classroom, in the past 10 years a number of researchers have applied this language socialization framework to the study of interaction in classroom. Among them, Cook (1999) analyzed monolingual elementary school classrooms in Japan, Ohta (1994; 1999; 2001a; 2001b) examined beginning-level JFL (Japanese as a foreign language) classrooms in the U.S., and Poole (1992) looked at ESL (English as a second language) classrooms in the U.S.

Poole (1992) examined teacher/student interaction in two ESL classes in light of Ochs and Schieffelin's perspective of language socialization. Poole's research was focused on: (a) teachers' accommodation of students' lack of language competence; (b) task accomplishment; and (c) teachers' display of asymmetry. Her analysis of the data revealed that overall, routine interactional sequences in the classrooms are consistent with Ochs and Schieffelin's findings from white middle class American (WMCA) adult-child interaction in many ways. Specifically, the two classrooms were similar to WMCA adult-child interaction in that: (a) teachers' accommodation to students is appropriate and pervasive; (b) the teachers gave assistance necessary for the students to accomplish tasks and gave entire credit for completing the tasks; and (c) there was a tendency for teachers to avoid the overt display of power differences.

On the other hand, Ohta (1994; 1999; 2001a; 2001b) looked at beginning-level Japanese as a foreign language classes. Ohta's studies showed how JFL learners acquire attentive listening behavior through peripheral and direct participation, such as observation of modeling of teachers, exposure to expression in instructional materials, and interaction with peers. In her 1999 study, Ohta examined the role of interactional routines in the socialization of expression of alignment among the learners. Her analysis revealed that although learners' production of expression of alignment was limited in teacher-fronted contexts, in both teacher-fronted and student-fronted contexts teachers reallocated turns so that students had opportunities to express alignment with their interlocutors. In addition, her longitudinal data, which was focused on one particular

student, showed that through repeated participation in the classroom routines, the student's ability to express a follow-up turn grew over one academic year, suggesting a profound impact of the classroom interactional routines upon the acquisition of interactional routines among the adult learners. Interestingly, Ohta's studies indicate that not only stronger students but also weaker students benefit from learner-learner collaboration in peer interaction.

These studies that apply the language socialization approach to examine classroom interaction have several points in common. First, they focus on socialization through language, that is, understanding expected cultural norms implicitly through participation in a particular participation structure or through the use of a particular word or phrase in daily routines. Second, their focus is not on acquisition of forms, but on interactional routines. Like other language socialization studies, they look for "cultural information not only in the content of discourse but in the organization of discourse as well" (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 170). Third, the authors of these studies carried out the studies by engaging in "prolonged observation" in authentic settings (Davis, 1995). Finally, they provide micro-analysis of interaction using electronic records and detailed transcription, which is common to nonnative interaction studies that apply the conversation analysis (CA) approach, which are introduced below.

### Conversation Analysis (CA) of Nonnative Interaction

In the past decade, there has been growing interest in applying CA methodology to examine NNS discourse in and out of the classroom (e.g., Carroll, 2000; Firth, 1996; Gafaranga, 2001; Hosoda, 2000; 2002; 2003; Kidwell, 2000; Koshik, 1999; 2002; Markee, 1995; 2000; Mori, 2002; Teleghani-Nikazm, 2002; Wagner & Firth, 1997; Wong, 1994; 2000a; 2000b). Using tape/video recorded data and their transcripts, these conversation analytic studies on NNS discourse analysis attempted to uncover distinct features of NNS discourse through analysis of the details of talk such as turn-taking, sequence organization, and repair.

Although the full-fledged application of CA methodologies to NNS discourse did not emerge until the early 90's, as early as 1980 two CA-inspired studies were introduced.

Gaskill (1980) investigated other-correction in NS-NNS interactions in English. The data analyzed for Gaskill's study are based on six sets of interactions with an Iranian nonnative speaker of English: four five-minute conversations between the nonnative speaker of English and four native speakers of American English; one five-minute conversation among the nonnative speaker, his wife, who was also a non-native speaker, and his American neighbor; and one five-minute conversation between the nonnative speaker and his computer instructor. Examining the other-corrections in his NS-NNS data, Gaskill compared his findings with those of Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) for NS-NS conversation, and found that his findings generally concur with those of Schegloff et. al, namely: (a) even in NS-NNS conversations, other-corrections were infrequent and highly restricted; (b) other-corrections were usually modulated; (c) when other-

corrections were not modulated, they usually occurred after modulated other-corrections or understanding checks or they occurred in the sequence of disagreement.

Shwartz (1980), on the other hand, looked at the organization of repair in NNS-NNS dyad interactions. The data for Shwartz's study consist of three NNS-NNS conversations between friends in English, involving six individuals in all. Each conversation lasted for approximately 15 minutes. In her data, Shwartz found examples of both self-initiated repair and other-initiated repair carried out both verbally and nonverbally, and argued that repair may be a process of negotiation in which interactants confer with each other to achieve mutual understanding. She also found that even between nonnative speakers, as in NS-NS conversations (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), self-repair was preferred and the interactant gave the speaker of a trouble source repeated chances to self-repair his/her own speech.

Although these 1980 studies demonstrated the potential of applying CA methodology to analyze NNS discourse and provided us with some insights into how repair in NS-NNS and NNS-NNS conversation works, we need more data in order to generalize their findings.

Studies after the early 90's have been carried out both within educational settings (e.g., Koshik, 1999; 2002; Markee, 1995; 2000; Mori, 2002) and outside of educational settings (e.g., Carroll, 2000; Firth, 1996; Gafaranga, 2001; Hosoda, 2000; 2002; 2003; Kidwell, 2000; Teleghani-Nikazm, 2002; Wagner & Firth, 1997; Wong, 1994; 2000a; 2000b).

Studies carried out within educational settings examined interaction in classrooms, group work, or private tutoring sessions.

Markee (2000) examined how second language learners deploy conversational behaviors in order to learn on a moment-by-moment basis in classrooms, and demonstrated the potential of CA methodology for capturing the intricate detail of talk-in-interaction in L2 classrooms. Markee's data came from audio- and video-taped intermediate to upper-intermediate ESL classes in a mid-western university in the U.S. His micro-analysis of the classroom interaction showed: (a) how one learner deploys talk to understand and learn the word "coral," at least in the short term in class, and (b) how another learner, under similar conditions, fails to understand and learn the meaning of the phrase, "We cannot get by Auschwitz." Markee argues that the two sets of analysis reveal that "CA methodology can be used to show whether, when, how, and why understanding and learning occur as conversational behavior" (p. 165), and the use of the methodology may contribute to revealing the important roles of negotiated talk and conversational modifications in promoting second language acquisition.

Mori (2002), on the other hand, looked at interactions in group activities in a JSL classroom at a university in the U.S. She described the relationship among the task instruction, the students' reaction to the instruction during their pre-task planning, and the development of actual talk with native speakers. Mori found that providing students with topics to talk about before the actual talk with the native speakers made students orient to the information transfer aspect of the talk: the students' over-reliance on sequence-initiating actions that students could

plan during the pre-task and the lack of acknowledgment of the contingency on the development of talk resulted in the talk similar to structured interviews. Mori argues that if students are to accomplish a task as natural and coherent discussion, they need to attend to the moment-by-moment development of talk and make their talk and other conduct sequentially relevant to the prior talk.

Furthermore, there are studies that examined teacher-student interaction at private tutoring sessions (Koshik, 1999; 2002). Koshik (2002) looked at how the interpretation of "reversed polarity questions (RPQs)" is interactionally accomplished in one-on-one second language writing sessions at a research university in the U.S. RPQs refer to yes/no questions that are treated by recipients as conveying an assertion of the opposite polarity to that of the grammatical form of questions. Koshik described (a) the ways teachers make use of the negative assertions conveyed by grammatically affirmative RPQs to criticize some parts of student text, diagnose problem and suggest solutions, and (b) implications of RPQs for understanding talk at institutional settings, connecting them with culture, pedagogical goals, and professional goals.

So far, there have been more CA studies on NNS interaction done outside of educational settings (e.g., Carroll, 2000; Firth, 1996; Gafaranga, 2001; Hosoda, 2000; 2002; 2003; Kidwell, 2000; Teleghani-Nikazm, 2002; Wagner & Firth, 1997; Wong, 1994; 2000a; 2000b) than in classrooms.

Firth (1996) demonstrated the linguistic and interactional resources deployed in NNS-NNS conversations in English. The data used for Firth's study were audio-recorded business telephone calls in two Danish international trading companies. The main purpose of the study was to test the applicability of a conversation analytic approach to NNS-NNS talk-data. His CA-based analyses have shown that although the NNS-NNS interactions were marked with linguistic infelicities and abnormalities, the parties in the interactions usually took the position that their talks were understandable, orderly, and "normal," as interactants in NS/NS conversations do. However, he also found that some talk-based activities such as spelling names might be less "robust" in NNS-NNS interactions. As the interactants were compelled to focus attention on each other's linguistic encoding and decoding capabilities in such activities, the interactional and linguistic deficiencies were ironed out.

Similarly, Wagner and Firth (1997) also examined audio-recorded business telephone conversations between employees of different Danish companies and their foreign partners. The authors' purpose was to look at the participants' use of communication strategies (CSs). Contrary to previous studies employing other methodologies, the conversation analytic study detected fewer CSs: there were no CSs unless the interlocutors overtly marked the problems of understanding the words or expressions by "putting up flags." Interestingly, the authors found that speakers used hesitation markers such as pauses to create and negotiate personal meanings, and listeners used practices such as repairs, understanding checks, and paraphrases to clarify whether they inferred the meaning in the sense the speaker intended. The study has shown that

even when participants are nonnative speakers, they normally orient toward sense-making and not toward repairing or correcting linguistic forms.

Firth (1996) and Wagner and Firth (1997) have shown that CA methodologies can be applicable to the study of NNS discourse, and may be “well placed to investigate the locally and contingently accomplished character of that competence” (Firth, 1996, p. 256). However, since the authors’ observations are restricted to a corpus of audio-recorded data from business settings in Danish, we still need to test their findings in different languages and different settings.

Wong (1994; 2000a; 2000b) examined NS-NNS telephone conversations between friends in English. The NNSs were all native speakers of Mandarin. She examined 150 pages of transcripts from 12 NS-NNS dyads. Wong detected some distinct features of NS-NNS conversation and discussed how NNSs’ identities as “learners” or “nonnatives” are constructed through these features. Wong also discussed implications for language acquisition and language socialization.

Wong (1994; 2000a) found that in her data, other-initiation of repair (OI) by NNSs was occasionally delayed within the next turn position. It has been found that when others initiate repair, repair is initiated as early as possible, directly following the trouble-source turn (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), as shown in the following flow chart.

#### Other-initiated Repair Sequence

Turn 1: Talk

Turn 2: Next Turn Repair Initiation (NTRI)

Turn 3: Response to the NTRI

However, Wong found that on occasion, other-repair sequences in NS-NNS conversation have the following sequence. (The letters “A” and “B” indicate turns that precede the OI; the letter “C” indicates “event C,” which follows turn “B”. The numbers “1,” “2,” and “3” indicate the turns implicated in the repair sequence. N refers to a native speaker and NN refers to nonnative speaker.)

#### Delayed Other-repair Sequence (Wong, 2000a, p. 253)

Turn A: Talk [N]

Turn B: Receipt [NN]

Event C: Gap of silence (or minimal talk) [N]

Turn 1: Other-initiation of repair [NN]

Turn 2: Turn A (now treated as trouble-source)

Turn 3: Response to the repair-initiator.

Wong explains the flow as follows. In turn B, NNS responds to A with utterances such as “uh-huh,” “oh,” and “tchow,” which claim understanding of turn A and thus pass up the first opportunity space afforded him/her for initiating repair. However, at the moment of initiating



repair, the NNS finds turn A problematic, surprising, or contrary to expectation, and thus the NNS analyzes turn A twice. And the silence or minimal talk in event C may indicate that the NS hears from the NNS's response that the NNS did not produce an appropriate or sequentially implicated next turn talk and the NS may be providing the recipient of turn A (NNS) with another opportunity to respond to the talk of turn A.

An example of delayed next turn repair initiation by a NNS is given below. (TST refers to trouble-source turn, the Xs indicates the initial response by the speaker who initiates repair, and the arrow indicates a repair initiation. Beth is a native speaker and Lin is a nonnative speaker.)

(1) [Wong, 2000a, p. 251]

TST Beth: so they were gonna go all the way to Montreal in nine days

XXX Lin: Oh::

(0.2)

→ Lin: Nine days?

Beth: Yeah

Lin: Jeesus

Schegloff (2000) notes that this pattern (i.e. freestanding receipt token + silence + other-repair) is extremely rare in his data of native speakers of English. Wong claims that the way NNSs produce delayed OIs within the next turn may be somewhat different from that of NSs and the difference may reveal NNSs' identities as learners or NNSs. Wong also argues that CA methodology may be better for studying interactive SLA than SLA approaches that focus solely on linguistic forms because its analyses are based on participants' orientations and the context which are relevant to the participants.

Using the same set of data, Wong (1994; 2000b) found distinctive use of a turn-medial "yeah" by NNSs in the same turn repair environment. She notes that turn-medial "yeah" cannot be found in her data from NS-NS conversation in Mandarin and English. The features of the distinctive use of "yeah" are described as follows. First, before the token "yeah," there is some talk that indicates some problems or troubles. Second, there is a token "yeah." Third, after "yeah," there is talk that is trouble-free and fluent, which shows that whatever was problematic before "yeah" is resolved. She also notes that there is repetition in the talk after "yeah." This repetition indicates that it is the beginning of a next "try" at producing a same but slightly modified version of the trouble-source utterance. Here is an example.

(2) [Wong, 2000b, p. 48]

Li: Yeah:: (.) yeah (h) an::d (0.5) uh: I called him once

\*h you da better call him:

(0.3)

Li: [uh::

Sara: [((sound of papers being shuffled))

Li: after:: one uh clock \*h

Li: because he- eh his roommate is American \*h an' uh he  
works in thee evening um:: thuh whole evening \*h an'  
then he came back in thuh

Li: [morning

Sara: [(h)(h)(h)(h)[((paper shuffling))

Sara: Yeah::

→Li: Uh he co- yeah he(.) usually comes back in thuh  
morning \*h an'then he:: (h) goes:: to bed:: you  
see(h) =

In the example above, before “yeah,” trouble is signaled by a cut-off (“co-”) and after “yeah” there is trouble-free talk by the same speaker. Some elements before “yeah,” “he” and “co-” are repeated in the talk after “yeah.”

However, Wong also found instances in which the talk after “yeah” is still ineffective and non-fluent. Given that the talk after “yeah” can be either fluent or non-fluent, she explains that the deployment of “yeah” by NNSs serves as “self-presentational display” (p. 60) in that it makes it clear that the speaker stops along the way to self-repair a problematic utterance as signaled by searching for a next item due. In this sense, it is one way in which NNSs present an image of one who is competently self-managing the problems. Wong further argues that such analysis reveals the sense of how “native” and “nonnative” identities are constructed in and through talk.

The studies by Wong provide some guidelines on how CA can be and should be used to analyze NNS discourse. However, since her data are from telephone conversations, the question still remains as to how NNSs deploy talk and other conduct in face-to-face conversation. As their interlocutors and the objects around them are visible as they talk, they may deploy visible resources such as posture, gaze, and use of surrounding objects to construct their talk.

One of the issues that Wong's studies addressed, the issue of identities and their relevance (e.g., “native,” “nonnative,” “monolingual speakers of X,” and “bilingual speakers of X and Y”) is also discussed in some other studies (Carroll, 2000; Gafaranga, 2001; Hosoda, 2002).

In essence, CA studies on nonnative discourse have shown that CA may provide a sound foundation for the study of nonnative discourse.

## Conclusion

In summary, previous SLA studies have revealed the importance of input and interaction in acquiring a second language. However, as many of these SLA studies tend to focus on linguistic

forms, how interactants use other interactional resources such as sequential organization, posture, gaze, and local environment in accomplishing actions remains unclear from these studies. Moreover, as the majority of these studies were conducted in classrooms or (quasi-) experimental settings, how nonnative speakers interact with others in ordinary conversation also remains to be examined.

On the other hand, some previous CA studies have examined NS-NNS or NNS-NNS conversation in natural settings. These studies argue for the importance of looking at participants' orientations in the talk and discourse contexts relevant to the participants. They question traditional methodologies that focus solely on linguistic forms in NNS talk and provide empirically-grounded analyses on not only language but also other resources such as sequential organization and local environment. These studies have demonstrated how we can make use of CA methodology to examine nonnative discourse.

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